

Washington DC – Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) today sharply critiqued the Bush Administration's proposal for reauthorizing highway and transit programs for the next six years. The administration's proposal, released yesterday, would cut federal funding for Oregon transportation projects over the next two years and provide only a ten percent increase over the next six years. It also would require state and local governments to carry more of the cost burden for transit projects like Portland's MAX system. Further, the bill does not provide enough funding to help fix Oregon's \$4.7 billion bridge problem.

"At a time when our economy is in a free fall and Oregon is on life support, the Bush Administration had a golden opportunity to give Oregon and the nation a major boost with this transportation funding proposal," Blumenauer said. "Instead, this week we've seen massive tax cuts for a few, while putting national transportation on a starvation diet.

"For every \$1 million in tax cuts, only 2 jobs are created," Blumenauer continued. "For every \$1 million spent on transportation, 19 family wage jobs are created in Oregon. And, a more efficient transportation system means a more efficient and productive economy. We have two challenges to meet with reauthorization. We need to put Americans, especially those in hard hit Oregon, back to work and promote strong economic and healthy environmental investments over the next six years. Congress should reject the Bush plan and enact legislation to put people to work today fixing crumbling bridges, expanding transportation choices and strengthening our economy."

Oregon currently receives \$300 million annually in federal highway funds. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) estimates that twice this amount is required to keep up with current needs. In particular, Oregon is facing a crisis with its aging bridge network. The Bush proposal provides less than \$275 million over the next six years in bridge funding. Currently, over 60 state-owned bridges have weight restrictions requiring trucks to take costly detours off major transportation routes. If nothing is done, an estimated 30 percent of state-owned bridges will be load limited by 2010.

The Bush proposal also leaves states and local governments on their own to face transportation challenges by decreasing federal participation in many programs. It proposes to reduce the federal share for transit program from 80% to 50%. This change could negatively impact the Portland region as it considers expanding its MAX and commuter lines.

The proposal released yesterday, the "Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act" (SAFETEA), would reauthorize federal transit and highway spending for the next six years. Congress is due to enact reauthorizing legislation this year.

Blumenauer Reacts to Bush Transportation Proposal

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Blumenauer is a member of the House Transportation Committee, the Committee charged with drafting the congressional reauthorization proposal.